

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- Today, Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Jim Leach (R-IA), together with over three dozen of their Republican and Democratic colleagues, will call on the House Appropriations Committee to provide \$20 million in humanitarian assistance for the civilian victims in Afghanistan through the FY03 Foreign Operations bill.

The letter is part of a series of actions that various Members of Congress have taken to assist the innocent victims in Afghanistan. In April, Reps. Cooksey and Meek organized a letter requesting funding in the '02 Supplemental Appropriations Bill. On the House floor last week, Rep. Blumenauer secured an agreement from the leaders of the House International Relations Committee that they would support legislation to directly assist innocent Afghans who were injured or killed during U.S. military operations.

"This is an extraordinarily powerful signal to the Afghan people and the world that the U.S. is well-intentioned and committed to helping build a new society," said Blumenauer. "Just as we are helping the innocent victims of the events of 9-11 in this country, we should help unintended victims of our war against Al-Queda."

The letter states, "In the aftermath of the Afghanistan campaign, we feel it is important for the United States to assist the people of Afghanistan and particularly to help unintended victims who have suffered directly due to our munitions. Widows have been left to care for children without means to provide food, health care, and clothing. Despite humanitarian efforts, women and children remain victims of this war and desperately need our help. All would agree that the military campaign in Afghanistan is against the Taliban and other terrorist organizations and not the people of Afghanistan."

In the past, the United States has provided aid to civilian casualties of military operations. The U.S. has awarded compensation to unintended victims of the following incidents: the Chinese Embassy bombing by the U.S. in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; the U.S. Marine Corps jet clipping of an Italian ski-lift cable in Cavalese, Italy; the inadvertent damage and destruction of homes during combat against Noriega's army in Panama; the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988; and loss and damage inflicted on persons and property in Switzerland during World War II.